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Vitz, Peter, 1825-1904.
My life journey

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MY LIFE JOURNEY

BIR

I was born October 6, 1825 in Rheidt, Province Gladbach, under the rule of Dusseldorf in Rhine-Prussia. Received holy baptism the same year. My Christened name is Peter. My parents names were Gottfried and Mathilda Vitt. The mother's maiden name was Cuennen. The family tree of my ancestors I have not been able to learn. It is understood that some with the name Vitt came as refugees (or because of persecution) into the region of my birth.

My father died when I was 12 years old. I was the eldest of 4 children. My devout mother was sick a number of years. My only brother died at the age of 12, and after that my mother also died. I still had the two sisters and they continue to live at Rheidt.

Since my father worked in the silk knitting business, my guardian felt I should learn the trade of my father. But I had no desire for it. I had little support on account of the early death of my father, and my situation was like that of many orphans who are in the world without a home. Schooling and parental training, I could not receive like other children. I was orphaned. However, the dear God, Father of orphans, has up to now held his faithful hand over me, and the dear Jesus is still my real guardian. The prayers of my devout mother have also gone with me into my youth. In the year 1841, after having been instructed in the Heidelberg catechism, I was confirmed by Rev. Herman Krebs and joined in with the congregation in the Holy Communion. In the year 1845 I was indicted as soldier in the Prussian army. After 2 years service time I received my undetermined (indefinite) release. In the year 1848 I was married. Meanwhile I was in a (school) life experience which I could not understand and was constantly led deeper. Then when our dear pastor remarked in one of our mission hour services: "In America is great need of evangelism". "People traveled 500 miles to a Synod meeting and pleaded for a preacher". When I heard this I said silently in my heart: "Lord can You use me? Then send me". The vow was made, but in church matters as well as in earthly matters I had much that many people do not have. I was as if tied down in earthly experience to the place where my cradle stood. Then in 1853, I along with wife and two children started on the way to America. We traveled in company with Bro. Kluge and his people, four in all, as we were eight persons in all. Of these three are still living, namely Rev. Becker of the Publishing House in Cleveland and my son and I. Rev. Kluge was treasurer many years of the Mission House in Wisconsin. In Germany we were active in the mission and youth organizations. Since as a child I could not receive the school education like other children, I had to take up night instruction later from a tutor as a youth.

Since I felt keenly that I was an orphan, I became very uncommunicative to other people, and this trait of character still is with me. As a result I formerly remained silent of what I am now writing. When it became known that I wanted to go to America, the question came up among my relatives and friends: "Why does Peter want to go to the Western Land?" I did however not state the reason until four old godly-devout men, three relatives and a grey headed stranger called me in the garden and asked me as under oath why I wanted to go to America. Now it was up to me to state the reason. From that time on they left me undisturbed and I prepared for the journey. Now I came into a different school (experience). It seemed hard for me to leave the fatherland and relatives. Also I had some misgivings of spirit, so I asked my wife three times the week of our departure if she had any objection to our journey. She answered every question with the statement: "No". "We must make the journey". When we were on the ocean the thought came to me: "Lord Jesus if you were not traveling along, I would feel like turning back". We were on the ocean about 9 weeks and lived through many storms. When we were about halfway across the ocean my youngest son died, just about a year old, and we had to commit him to the waters of the ocean and leave him behind. Upon my appeal to the captain to permit us to take the body with us to land he said he could not and was not permitted by ship regulations. Then he said, Don't you see the ocean is for us sailors an open grave? But eventually the ocean will also have to give back its dead again. This lovely statement of the noble man served as a funeral address for

my child. Then the captain said: "I will have them make a casket for your child, and the body shall be lowered in it". The lovely words of the captain, and that he would have a casket made for the deceased, I shared with my wife, then I added: "We must abide by the ship regulations and must give up the little one. She surrendered her earnest and sorrowing heart to God. In conference with the people aboard, it was agreed the little one was to be lowered that evening at mealtime. The word "Boatsmen" was to indicate to me when it was to take place. We were traveling in second cabin. The upper deck pilot stepped to the door and called "Boatsmen". I alone knew what the call indicated. After a few moments I went on deck the ship, found there the captain with several matresses before which stood the little casket. When I came they all removed their hats, lifted the casket over the side of the boat by the ropes and lowered him in the deep of the ocean. As they let go of the ropes, I yet saw the little casket, and I felt like I had to grasp it. The next morning early I came on deck of the ship and looked for the casket. Naturally I could not see it any more. My wife asked "How are they going to proceed with the little one?" By that time, however, the little one was far and deep behind us. I answered her: " Let us be content with the words - the ocean also will give up its dead "again". We want to commit the little one to the ship people and to almighty God until we shall one day see each other again in heaven. Thereby she surrendered to God and seemed to be satisfied and found peace. After we had landed, we continued the trip and arrived at Manitowac, Wisconsin where we had fellow immigrants. My wife, usually well, complained of being sick. In Wisconsin, we were received very friendly by our acquaintences. We had a chance to get a good rest and medical care for my wife. However, she daily became weaker and died early in February 1854. Now I was orphaned again, with a small orphan boy entirely without relatives in America and felt forsaken, thinking "You have led wife and child to their death." Yet this thought left me when I remembered the words of the vow, which she spoke to me at the last. When she noticed what I wanted to say about the journey and tried to point hopefully to her improvement she said: "I am returning home. I accompanied you thus far and the dear Heavenly Father will provide for you". That, the dear Heavenly Father has done. Meanwhile I felt alone like in my childhood and got to think I should now live alone with my child deep in the primitive forest. But where ever I went or stood, always the question came up: "What did you travel to America for." I had come here to serve as tract distributor (colportuer) in the Kingdom of Christ, since I lacked the education for the ministry. In order to come to peace concerning my life question, I investigated concerning a Reformed church school. Then I heard of Heidelberg College in Tiffin, Ohio and that also they had a school of theology. I wrote to Professor E. V. Gerhart, that I desired to go to Tiffin at my own expense and see if I could not qualify to enter the school, and agreed to leave again if I could not be accepted. This brief statement of mine determined my whole future and my life work. I received reply that I might come. I obtained shelter for my small boy with some family and traveled to Tiffin. When I beheld the school and observed the students I almost cried and thought: "What do you poor mortal want here?" In the evening I looked up the beloved Proferror Gerhart. He took me into his room and was very friendly. He did not ask many question. However, he asked the question whether I was acquainted with the Heidelberg catechism. I replied I received instruction in it. He gave me certain matter of advice and I remained in Tiffin. I rented a room in a private home and lived there a short time until vacation set in. I attended instruction and gave time to study and at times I worked until the cholera came to Tiffin. Then I came into a different life-school for in the family where I stayed the sickness struck five persons to whom I gave care - three died. A small child and I were still on our feet and we attended the sick. So I had to deal with the living and the dead. Only the great God who decrees over life and death stood by me in my difficult situation and enabled me to go on (remain erect).

My money gave out when I had spent two years in the Seminary and the college. I paid all my own expenses and also paid for the care of my child. I informed the

Professor of my situation and they told me they wanted to help provide support for me, but I thought I would rather quit and take over some mission field. They wanted to recommend to have me licensed to preach at the meeting of Synod which was about to meet in Tiffin. I thanked them for this, but I felt I was not qualified for a license to preach. Then the brethren gave serious consideration and stated I could remain in the seminary. So I followed their advice. I received the license for the ministry from Ohio Synod and later was ordained by the Tiffin Classes in 1856 and was sent immediately as missionary to Adams County, Indiana.

For my vacation time in 1855 I was, upon recommendation of E. V. Gerhart, sent to Toledo by the American Tract Society as colportuer (tract distributer). I was also to be helpful to the many immigrants who were traveling through the city at that time. I found there a world within a small area. I also tried as much as I could to help along in our small mission congregation in that city.

In the year 1856 when I came as missionary to Adams County, Indiana I found mostly the original forest. The people lived in log houses and occasionally yet one saw the wolves. I found shelter in a log house for myself and boy. I sought to organize a congregation with 13 members. One member who died donated three acres for a site for church and parsonage and also burial ground. My salary was $150.00 most of which was contributed by five members. First a log house was erected for me and the next year we built a lovely church. As I now resided alone in the log house with my boy, the congregation gave me the advice that it would be well for me to remarry. I asked them if they knew of a helpmeet for me. They answered, No. Then I said, "I don't know one either". So lived on into the fall. Then I was given permission to travel to Tiffin because of a death. Then I would like to return by way of Toledo. It was night when the train started for Toledo. Deeply entrenched in thought, my eyes fell on a family who had three children with them and how well they were provided for in all things needed. I sorrowed deeply at heart to think of my situation. I braced my arm on the window and my head rested on my hand. Then it was as if some one spoke in my ear: "Before you get home you will be accompanied by a helpmeet". Now I laughed to myself even through my tears. In Toledo I had a friend with whom I took lodging and planned to travel on with the next train. In the friend's home the first question was:"How are you managing with your child?". "You have responsibilities and you should remarry". I asked, with whom, and they answered they did not know. And I replied I did not know either. After that I walked in the garden, and saw at the next neighbor a person stepping to the well to draw water. I went to my friend at once and asked who that person was. He answered she was the hired girl and a member of the Reformed Church. I said: "She is going to become my wife". He started to laugh out loud, and yet I saw he was serious as he looked in concern to me. Then I said: "I am not leaving on the next train. I must wait this out". I had never seen this person and had never heard of her. Towards noon my friend said what I thought about it, and how this was going to go. I answered: "I don't know". He asked: "Shall my wife ask her to come over later?". I answered: "I would like that". About 2 o'clock in the afternoon the person came into my friend's home leading a child on each hand. My friend introduced me and then absented himself. After I had presented my situation as man, father missionary and my poverty, I asked her if she could entrust herself to that kind of a man. She became white, red, and her face blushed and she made no answer. I told her I did not expect an answer until she had looked to God and had thought it over. I would delay my journey yet one more day. Finally she left with the children to the place of her employment. The next day she returned and handed me her baptismal certificate and confirmation certificate and an accompanying letter from her father and she remarked: "These papers show where I come from and that I am free to pledge myself to you". We now gave the information to the family where she worked, of our plans and they released her from service in a friendly manner. From the papers she gave me I saw that she was Swiss, of the congregation at Ruppenhuegel in the Canton of Bern. Her father, Benedicht Jacob was a school teacher in that neighborhood. Now it really

came to pass what I laughed about two nights before on the train. We were married by the local pastor in the presence on an elder of the church. This was in the fall of 1856, and after that we proceeded to my mission charge and arranged our log house like immigrants. The next spring began the building of the church, or at least preparations were made. In the summer we were visited by the missions agent, Pastor Zimber, and he saw to it that we obtained $100 support from the eastern mission board. The next year we got $60. After that we tried to get through without support from the mission board. Since the congregation now had a church and a parsonage I undertook to establish a church in the county seat town. Here in Decatur, Indiana the church was still weak, yet we built a church, the very one in which the congregation worships even today. Also I founded a congregation which now has been merged with the one at New Villa, Wells county, making a pastorate. After 5 years, in the year 1861 my strength failed me and I had to rest a month on the urgent request of my physician. I gave my position over to another preacher and lived in with one of my elders. Then came an earnest call from the broken down and deeply indebted congregation at Huntington, Indiana. I was afraid of this location, for I was acquainted with the situation. Yet I felt impelled to go and continued in the work there for ten years. I could not even bring together 10 members in the beginning necessary to do official business. The dear God, however, blessed us so that in 10 years we had one of the finest church properties consisting of church, parsonage and school and everything debt free. Then I said to the congregation: "My work here is completed" and with thanks of the congregation I left there in 1871. Then we did not know where we might go. At that time I received a call from the congregation at Lafayette, Indiana, which I accepted. Here I found what power a president can have over his congregation in making effective his ideas and their acceptance of same. Two years I had to work with the consistory to get them to see the position of the president. Our dear God, however, permitted us to succeed in bringing the congregation under our (church) government. In this congregation I experienced a wonderful day when it was possible for me on one Sunday to receive into membership 23 adults by profession of faith. After a little more than 6 years, in 1877, I accepted a call to New Villa, Wells county, Indiana. That was my old mission field which lay before me in Adams and Wells county. There I continued 6 years and I am happy now that I could come to their help, since we now have 5 congregations and 4 nice parsonages there. Since I could not longer do the traveling, due to rheumatism and neuralgia, I gave up the pastorate in the fall of 1883 in favor of my son Otto, in agreement with the congregation. After New year, I received a call from the "Mosel" congregation in the neighborhood of Lake Michigan in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, not far from the Mission House. I thought a small charge might be good for me and accepted the call. However, by reason of the snow my suffering became worse and I had to return to the accustomed climate. In the year 1886 we again moved to Indiana. Soon I received a call from Delphos, Ohio. I accepted this and I am serving here now for 5 years. We serve a small weak congregation. Now in 1891 I entered my 67th year and am happy to have laid aside most of my work. I must be sincerely thankful to my dear God, and Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. We have 10 children and 16 grandchildren near and far. One grand child died. Three sons and two sons-in law are preachers in our church and one son is in the Mission House as a student for the ministry. So I was permitted Sundays along with five children to stand in holy places to declare Christ the crucified as our Saviour. Except the three youngest children, all are married.

Now I have written down part of the events of my life as you requested of the things I had not spoken before or talked about. I hope, in the name of God, that my saviour will fulfill my uncompleted work, so that the weak may become strong, and the foolish be brought to wisdom. For me there is a lovely place in the temple of God, to step to the side of the publican and to pray in Jesus name to God for Grace

In God's Service,

Delphos, 1891 Peter Vita.

The Beginning and the End.

Since many of my papers were lost, I cannot give all dates with absolute accuracy. I did not keep books in the matter of my official appointments and can therefore not give statistics.

Born in 1825
Baptized 1825
Confirmed 1841
Inducted as soldier 1845 in the Prussian army
Married 1848 to Savilla K. Toeres
Emigrated to America 1853
Wife died in February 1854
Entered Heidelberg College, Tiffin, Ohio 1854
Licensed, ordained and sent out as missionary 1856
Second marriage to Anna M. Jacob in fall 1856
Went to Huntington 1861
Lafayette 1871
New Villa 1877
Wisconsin 1884
Delphos 1886

Written in Delphos, Ohio 1891.

Peter Vitz.

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